

Experiences of an internet-based support and coaching model for adolescents and young adults with ADHD and autism spectrum disorder -a qualitative study.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:

There is a great demand for non-medical treatment and support targeting the needs of adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). There is also a lack of qualitative studies providing in-depth insight into these individuals' own experiences within this area. The current study aimed to explore how adolescents and young adults with ADHD, ASD or both experienced taking part in an internet-based support and coaching intervention.

METHODS:

Sixteen participants with ASD, ADHD or both who had participated in an 8-week internet-based support and coaching model, were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

RESULTS:

Analysis yielded three themes; Deciding to participate, Taking part in the coaching process and The significance of format. Various motives for joining were expressed by participants, such as viewing the technology as familiar and appealing and expecting it to be better suited to their situation. There was also a previously unfulfilled need for support among participants. In deciding to take part in the intervention the coaches' competence and knowledge were considered essential, often in the light of previously negative experiences. Taking part in the coaching process meant feeling reassured by having someone to turn to in view of shared obstacles to seeking and receiving help. The support was used for talking through and receiving advice on matters related to their diagnosis. Findings further revealed appreciation for aspects relating to the format such as communicating through the written word, being in one's own home and an experience of immediacy. Some disadvantages were voiced including incomplete personal interaction and failing technology. There were also suggestions for greater flexibility.

CONCLUSIONS:

The in-depth qualitative data obtained from this study suggest that the current model of support and the internet-based format have specific qualities that could play an important role in the support of adolescents and young adults with ADHD and ASD. Although not a replacement for face-to-face interaction, it could be a promising complement or alternative to other support and treatment options.

TRIAL REGISTRATION:

"Internet-based Support for Young People with ADHD and Autism - a Controlled Study" retrospectively registered in www.clinicaltrials.gov (ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT02300597) at 2014-11-10.